



# News Release

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## **Vote! Or Liberty Is History** **Department of Education Kicks Off New Effort To Improve** **Voter Turnout Statewide**

Believing that public schools play an important role in creating responsible citizens, the Michigan Department of Education announced a new effort today designed to encourage voter turnout statewide.

**Vote! Or Liberty Is History** encourages citizens in Michigan to regularly vote and participate in the political process, regardless of political affiliation, said Tom Watkins, Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction.

"I believe that our neighborhood public schools play a crucial role in teaching students the four 'R's,' reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and responsibility," Watkins said. "It is the role of public education to prepare students to be engaged participants in our democracy."

The effort has two major goals - increase voter turnout rates for the August 6th primary election and the November general election, especially among the state's young people, and to raise awareness regarding public responsibility for participating in the democratic process.

The non-partisan effort is supported by the State Board of Education, and by State Representative Doug Hart (R-Rockford), who also serves as Director of the Michigan Civics Institute.

"I have been in our schools challenging our students to learn about and be involved in their government, to give back to their community, to register to vote, and participate in the political process," said John C. Austin, member of the State Board of Education. "I am committed to continuing to work with schools and educators across Michigan to help our young people prepare for and realize their full role as participating citizens."

"The political apathy of youth is well documented," Hart said. "It is our hope that, if we can encourage young people to go to the polls when they first become 'voter eligible,' it will be the beginning of a lifetime of civic involvement."

Since the early 1960s, voter participation rates have plummeted annually. In the 1998 primary election, only 20 percent of registered voters participated and all signs point to an even smaller voting population in the important 2002 primary and general elections.

"If our free society is to remain free, each of us must be an involved participant in the democratic process," Watkins said. "As in recent close political contests, such as the 2000 presidential election, one vote can make a difference. Regardless of your political affiliation, it is important for everyone to exercise their constitutional right to vote."

More information about **Vote! Or Liberty is History** can be found at the Department of Education's web site, [www.michigan.gov/mde](http://www.michigan.gov/mde).